

**City of Belmont
PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING NOVEMBER 7, 2012
MINUTES**

The regular meeting of the Belmont Parks & Recreation Commission of November 7, 2012 was called to order at 7:00 p.m. at the Belmont City Hall Council Chambers.

I. ROLL CALL

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Kevin Sullivan, Commissioner (C) Bortoli, Wong, Block, Youth Commissioner (YC) Zakeri, and C Eric Sullivan

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Vice Chair Wright and YC Bartee

STAFF PRESENT: Parks and Recreation Director (PRD) Gervais & Secretary (S) Saggau

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

C Wong moved, seconded by C Bortoli, to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of October 3, 2012. Vote 6-0 in favor.

III. PUBLIC COMMUNICATION/COMMENTS/ANNOUNCEMENTS

PRD Gervais announced the Holiday Craft Faire would be held at Twin Pines Park on November 17 and 18.

PRD Gervais noted there was no Sports Advisory Committee meeting in the last month.

IV. AGENDA AMENDMENTS

None.

V. OLD BUSINESS

None.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

- a. **Discussion of Belmont's Open Space Including Current Condition, Management, and Future Planning**

PRD Gervais noted Belmont has a significant amount of open space - approximately 335 acres. These areas connect to other open space areas including the San Francisco Watershed and Sugarloaf in San Mateo. He pointed out the different areas of open space, the Waterdog Lake canyon and Carlmont canyon are south of Ralston Avenue. The San Juan Canyon open space area is on the north side of Ralston Avenue.

PRD Gervais reviewed the main trail access points for the Water Dog Lake area. He noted there is sufficient parking at the Lake Road entrances but at times there is limited parking available at the Carlmont Canyon entrance. He added there are several signs posted at the trailheads and staff is considering enhancing these areas by consolidating the signs onto one large display board.

PRD Gervais stated trail users include mountain bikers, hikers, joggers, walkers and dog walkers. So far there has been limited conflict between these groups. There have been some concerns expressed about the challenges between mountain bikers and hikers/walkers/runners. The Police Department has not had reports of accidents between the user groups. Signage on trail etiquette at the trailheads and increased communication between the user groups would be beneficial. PRD Gervais noted the City has received complaints about off-leash dog walking on the trails. The City does not have the resources to manage and fully enforce the leash laws but dogs are required to be on a leash.

PRD Gervais said there are approximately 10 miles of trails in the Water Dog Lake area. Lake Road trail is a wide trail as it was an old dirt road; most of the other trails are single track trails. Trail maintenance is a challenge with erosion, overgrowth and lack of resources. Ways to increase resources are grants, donations, city funds and advocates for open space.

A project to realign the Lake Loop trail has been the main focus for trail improvements. The original trail was often under water. It has been a volunteer project, mainly led by mountain bike riders. PRD Gervais explained once this project is finished it is unlikely any new trails will be built in the Water Dog Lake area.

PRD Gervais said new trails may be built in the San Juan Canyon area. The City purchased land in this open space so there may be some plans made for trails in that area. There is some uncertainty as lots may be sold for potential housing to offset the loan for the land purchase. There have been some challenges in this area with unpermitted trail building. Entrances into this area are at the end of San Juan Boulevard and on Bishop Road.

PRD Gervais noted having open space next to housing has some challenges with people building stairs to the trails and erosion created from storm water runoff. Some residents have cut trees to improve their view. In order to deal with this the city could send letters to neighbors and install some boundary markers to delineate open space.

PRD Gervais said another issue in the open space areas is fire management. The Water Dog Lake area has the highest fire severity danger rating and the San Juan area has the second highest fire rating danger. If a fire occurs, in addition to the immediate damage, there would be longer term consequences with potential sliding and erosion. Invasive species of plants create ladder

fuel that take the fire from the ground into the tree canopies. Fire Safe Crews have removed some brush along Lake Road but with state budget cuts this service has been cut back.

PRD Gervais stated there have been some cases of Sudden Oak Death in the open space. However it is difficult to tell because the oak moth can also defoliate trees. PRD Gervais noted wildlife observed in the open space areas include deer, coyotes and wood rats. PRD Gervais explained the open space also provides relief to the storm drainage system. It acts as a reservoir for storm water. Without it more flooding problems would occur.

PRD Gervais summarized that Belmont is very lucky to have the open space. It improves the environment and the quality of life. It also provides recreational opportunities. He added there is a responsibility to reduce conflicts and be conscientious of other trail users and impacts on the neighborhood. It is also important to invest more in the maintenance and upkeep of the open space area and educating people and creating advocates to protect the open space.

PRD Gervais asked if the Commission wanted to identify topics for further discussion or would like to create a smaller group to take on some of the issues.

PRD Gervais responded to Commission questions:

- 50 Acres around Water Dog Lake is owned by Notre Dame de Namur University. The City of Belmont entered into a 50 year lease on the land in 1965 for \$100/year by agreeing to maintain the dam and the open space around it. There was as an option to continue the lease for another 50 years which the City has exercised so until 2065 the property will continue to be leased for \$100/year.
- There has been some effort to educate people about invasive species by posting signs at the trailheads and providing information at the Parks & Recreation office.
- There is not much data on trail usage. A volunteer did monitor Lake Road and that trail gets the most use. If there was an opportunity it would be nice to interview trail users.
- Off-leash dogs have not created any reported incidents of great severity.
- Staff could ask the City of San Mateo if they would be interested in sharing their Park Rangers to enforce rules on the trails.
- Fire Services costs are shared amongst all the municipalities. Each organization covers their own costs.
- Trails are open year-round. Seasonal closures could be an option but difficult to enforce.
- A Parks Maintenance employee was assigned to be a liaison to the open space. Most work on the trails is complaint driven when something needs to be fixed. The City has been involved in the Lake Loop Trail and the cost for the bridge will be paid for by the City.
- The Police Department also responds to enforce rules when complaint driven.
- There are trail markers in the open space.
- There has not been a regular occurrence of conflicts between neighbors and trail users.
- The Police Department has not had to respond to criminal incidents but have responded to some rescues for heart attacks and a fatal mountain bike rider crash.
- Park Rangers in San Mateo enforce park rules, manage conflicts, and check park permits.

Public Comments

Michael Munrow spoke in favor of open space trails and expressed appreciation to the mountain bike community for building many of the trails in the Water Dog Lake area. He has seen very little conflict between different trail users. He agreed interaction between the different trails users to increase communication and self-policing would be helpful. Coherent signage at the trail heads on right of ways would be useful to alleviate potential conflicts.

Mike Mitchell – expressed thanks to Belmont for providing a great open space and supports keeping the trails multi-use.

Valentine Goreno – expressed concern with safety on Water Dog Lake trails as he had a couple of near misses with mountain bike riders. He stated some mountain bike riders go downhill at high speeds.

Johanna Wolgast – agreed the open space is a wonderful wilderness. She noted there is erosion throughout the park and many unmarked trails that bike riders have made. She disagreed that there is a peaceful coexistence on the trails and noted that bike riders outnumber the pedestrians and that some people have stopped going to the park. She expressed concern that the Lake Loop Trail is being converted into another bike trail as it was one trail where pedestrians did not have to fear being hit by a bike. She said the bike riders cannot control their speed going downhill. She added she no longer goes to the park due to the need to be on constant alert of bike riders. She suggested the idea of having a consultant to evaluate the trails. She presented pictures to the Commission to review.

Charles Jalavwas – owner of Passion Trail bikes in Belmont spoke about the financial benefits his shop has provided for the community with sales tax and payroll. He noted Belmont is the only place on the peninsula his business would be viable due to its location and the close access to trails.

Mike Davis – requested the Commission make sure selected locations for trails heads in the San Juan Canyon area remain if land is sold for development.

Loren Thomas – stated he is regular user of the trails as both a hiker and bike rider. He has never had any issues with bikers while hiking; he has startled some hikers when biking but has always been in control of his bike. He expressed appreciation for the freedom to choose activities on the trails. He spoke in favor of potential improvements to the Elevator Trail and the cinder block section.

Wazeen Khan – Architect Student at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo stated he is doing his senior project on Water Dog Lake with a focus on irrigation and trail design. He noted Water Dog Lake is a giant watershed and connects to three school sites. His project will address the quality of water, flood control and the addition of amenities to the site. He added Water Dog Lake provides a good opportunity on showing how to reuse and recycle water and questioned if the city would consider using it for irrigation.

Jay Zimmerman – expressed appreciation to Chair Kevin Sullivan for his efforts in organizing trail maintenance. He stated he is a multi-use trail user at Water Dog Lake trails and described them as the premier trail system on the mid-peninsula. He said he understand the parking situation and usually rides his bike to the area. He uses a bell to alert pedestrians on the trails. He agreed it would be a good idea to increase communication to promote safety.

Dan Prudhomme – stated he uses the park for hiking and mountain biking and if he does worry about getting hit it is when he is on a bike. He explained as a hiker he stays aware and knows how to stay safe. He also carries bells when hiking and biking to alert others. He suggested charging a small fee for use of the area to help maintain it and open up other areas and promoting enforcement. He added the park does offer a rare privilege to bike riders and noted a pristine area above Hallmark is available for hikers only.

Benita Zimmerman – a mountain bike rider and hiker says she uses a bell and they are very effective. She stated at another bike riding location on weekends they post signage and make some trails one-way. She expressed thanks to the volunteers that have done work on the trails.

Commissioner Comments

C Wong inquired if it would be possible to include some questions on trail usage in the survey. PRD Gervais said a separate survey on trails and open space could be done. C Wong questioned if there were methods that could be done to slow down biker such as zigzag trails.

C Bortoli noted time will need to be dedicated when work starts on the San Juan area and suggested requesting a small budget for it. He proposed starting with signage that includes trail maps, rules and tips on trail safety. He also suggested considering restricting some trails from bike use where it could be dangerous. C Bortoli added there should be a plan for San Juan to identify areas that could be sold to pay for the purchase costs while considering the best locations for trailheads.

C Block thanked PRD Gervais for the presentation and the community for being in attendance. He stated he uses the open space at Waterdog as both a biker and a hiker and he interfaces with a lot of people and sees most are respectful of others. There is the occasional bad apple and those issues could be approached in a self-policing way and using education. He agreed that bells are a great idea. He noted hikers with ear buds in both ears are a bad situation. C Block spoke in favor of better signage and suggested checking into how other communities take care of their multi-use trails.

YC Zakeri stated she thought the bells were a great idea but was not in favor of zigzag trails. She spoke in favor of allowing people to challenge themselves and keeping the trails multi-use. She expressed a preference for educating people on safety instead of enforcing rules.

C Eric Sullivan noted it appears the majority of the trail use is by mountain bike riders and they have done the majority of trail development. He expressed concern with a permanently increased danger for pedestrians. He would like everyone to have a safe experience and would like to learn more about how conflicts are resolved in other locations. C Eric Sullivan said everyone should

be able to enjoy the trails and a plan for a pedestrian only trail may be a potential solution to consider.

CC Kevin Sullivan acknowledged he is a part of the mountain bike community and the volunteer that leads most of the trail work. He agreed there is a need for more maintenance of the trails and the volunteers could use more help with the work. There has been assistance from other groups on community days but that the mountain bikers have completed the majority of the work. The Lake Loop trail has taken a considerable amount of time and it will provide a trail that is safe and accessible to all users. When it is completed volunteers will be able to spend more time on maintenance.

CC Kevin Sullivan agreed the park should be safe and enjoyable for everyone. He would support encouraging use of bells and noted that in some areas they have bells at the trailheads that people can borrow while using the trail. He added that the bike community is willing to help police their own group. He noted that staff gets more calls concerning dogs off leash on the trails.

CC Kevin Sullivan said there is not one user group that has dominance over the others but that is was important to note that the trail network would not be there if the mountain biking community had not built it. To eliminate that user group after they did the work would be unfair. In addition if that group is eliminated, the trails would not be maintained and would deteriorate

Following Commission discussion an Ad-Hoc Committee consisting of C Eric Sullivan, C Block, CC Kevin Sullivan and YC Zakeri was formed. They will meet to discuss issues, solicit comments from the public and report back to the Commission.

The Commission took a brief recess from 9:10-9:15. YC Zakeri departed at this time.

VII. DEPARTMENT REPORTS

A. Questions and Comments

PRD Gervais reported the following:

- The Cipriani Dog Park Project is finished. There are a couple of issues with the gates and erosion and these items will be corrected. CC Kevin Sullivan added he attended a fundraiser event at the dog park and he heard a lot of positive comments on the improvements.
- The survey was sent to a few people to test it and it was discovered that it was too long to work well on mobile devices. The size of the survey was reduced slightly by eliminating the questions on taxes. PRD Gervais will send the revised survey to Commissioners that requested another opportunity to review it prior to launching it.

- C Cheechov has resigned from the Commission. The City Council will discuss what to do with that position at their November 13, 2012 meeting.
- The one year review of the Tree Ordinance is also on the November 13, 2012 City Council agenda.
- Improvements to the Barrett Community Center classrooms are being pursued so that it will be ready for summer programs. If completed, there may be an opportunity to rent it to Camp Galilleo.
- A designer was brought on to work on the Senior Center improvements.
- A project to maintain the street trees in the Sterling Downs neighborhood will be on the City Council agenda of November 13, 2012.

In response to C Wong's & C Bortoli's questions, PRD Gervais acknowledged the early registration for the CPRS conference has passed and staff learned that the Commissioners cannot share a registration. When the schedule is available to review Commissioners can let staff know which day they would like to attend.

In response to C Eric Sullivan's question, PRD Gervais said that staff will add some gravel to the access path to the dog park. C Block said he has been to the dog park and has regularly seen people use the grass field next to it. PRD Gervais said the Police will respond to this if reported.

Responding to C Wong's question a tree has been ordered for Alexander Park. He added an order has been made for the tree give away and all those requesting a tree from the Sterling Downs and Homeview neighborhoods will receive one.

C Bortoli said he has received call concerning a window in the Senior/Community Center clouding up and a pink couch in the Lodge. Staff explained the couch was likely from the Haunted House and has not been removed yet.

C Block reported a dead oak tree near Water Dog Lake fire road that appears that it could fall down. He will get the specific location to staff so they can check it out.

B. Future Agenda Items

Belmont Sport Complex Synthetic Turf Project

Survey Results

Barrett Community Center

Recreation Programs

Parks & Open Space Master Plan

January meeting

San Juan Canyon Status

PRD Gervais noted there would be a Tree Board meeting prior to the next Parks & Recreation Commission meeting in December.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:48 p.m.

Jonathan Gervais
Parks & Recreation Director